

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 SSM-03 IO-13 OMB-01 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04
SIL-01 CU-02 /087 W
-----121026Z 049254 /12

R 120807Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8002
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUWAIT 2590

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, KU
SUBJECT: KUWAITI INTERNAL POLITICAL CONTROLS RELAXING

REF: (A) KUWAIT 2286, (B) KUWAIT A-029.

1. SUMMARY: ALONG WITH THE BEGINNINGS OF MOVEMENT TOWARD
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, WHICH THE AMIR HAS PROMISED, THERE ARE
SOME INDICATIONS OF A LOOSENING OF POLITICAL CONTROLS OVER THE
PRESS AND ACTIVITIES OF PUBLIC GROUPS, AND A DEFT CARROT AND
STICK APPROACH TOWARD ORGANIZED LABOR. IF AREA DEVELOPMENTS
CONTINUE TO HOLD OUT THE PROSPECT OF AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT,
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THE OUTLOOK FOR CONTINUED INTERNAL POLITICAL RELAXATION WILL
REMAIN GOOD. END SUMMARY

2. A NUMBER OF INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL
MONTHS POINT TO A GRADUAL RELAXATION OF INTERNAL POLITICAL CONTROLS,
ALONG WITH A PROBABLE START ON THE RETURN TO POLITICAL NORMALCY
WHICH THE AMIR HAS PROMISED. THE GOK HAS ANNOUNCED NO

RELAXATION, NOR HAS IT YET TAKEN ANY MEANINGFUL STEPS TO RETURN THE COUNTRY FROM RULE BY DECREE TO NORMAL, CONSTITUTIONAL RULE. THERE HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN SOME APPARENT SHIFTS IN POSTURE BY KEY MINISTERS, AND SOME OTHER SIGNS, INDICATING THAT KUWAITI LEADERS NO LONGER FEEL COMPELLED TO KEEP THE BATTENS ON ALL THE HATCHES. THE MOST PUBLICIZED OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS WAS THE AMIRI ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WOULD BEGIN CONSULTATIONS WITH THE CABINET AND OTHERS ON THE NAMING OF A CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION COMMITTEE. THESE CONSULTATIONS HAVE CONTINUED APACE; THE AMIR HAS BEEN DISCUSSING THE MATTER WITH EX-OFFICIALS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE CROWN PRINCE, AND THE WHOLE CABINET (IN AT LEAST TWO EXTRAORDINARY SESSIONS).

3. ALSO WORTHY OF NOTE IS THE INCREASING BOLDNESS OF THE PRESS, WHICH HAD BEEN MUZZLED THOROUGHLY LAST SEPTEMBER. EDITORIALS AND NEWS STORIES ARE OCCASIONALLY TREADING GROUND NOW WHICH WAS FORBIDDEN DURING THE LAST HALF OF 1976 -- THERE IS EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF CONTROVERSIAL EVENTS, INCLUDING OCCASIONAL UNFAVORABLE EDITORIAL COVERAGE OF "BROTHER" ARAB COUNTRIES, INTERVIEWS WITH A WIDE SELECTION OF CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL FIGURES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND EVEN SPECULATION ON THE FUTURE OF KUWAITI-IRAQI RELATIONS. THERE ARE ALSO INCREASING ATTACKS ON LIVING CONDITIONS IN KUWAIT, INCLUDING THE SHORTAGE OF HOUSING, LACK OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND UNSAFE STREETS. THERE MAY BE MORE OF THIS IN THE WAKE OF RECENT TRIAL AND APPELLATE COURT DECISIONS WHICH ACQUITTED THE EDITOR OF KUWAIT DAILY AL RAI AL AM OF A CRIMINAL CHARGE MADE LAST NOVEMBER, STEMMING FROM HIS PAPER'S EDITORIAL CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT MEDICAL SERVICES. THE EFFECTIVE, CONFIDENTIAL

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SARCASTIC CRITICISM, BASED LARGELY ON FACT, HAD CHARGED UNNAMED HEALTH OFFICIALS WITH A COVERUP OF SHODDY STANDARDS, BUT THE COURTS LET THE EDITOR OFF BECAUSE HIS CRITICISM WAS DEEMED "CONSTRUCTIVE." THUS, WHILE THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION STILL HAS THE POWER TO SUSPEND PUBLICATIONS -- NONE HAVE BEEN SHUT DOWN SINCE JANUARY -- THIS JUDICIAL DECISION SEEMS TO MEAN THAT WRITERS ENJOY LIMITED PROTECTION BY AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY, EVEN UNDER RULE BY DECREE.

4. IN THE LABOR FIELD ALSO, THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS SEEM TO AUGUR FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND LABOR, WITH AT LEAST SOME PROSPECT OF RESTORED ECONOMIC POWER. THIS WEEK WE ARE DISPATCHING AN AIRGRAM (REF B) WHICH EXAMINES THE IMPROVING GOVERNMENT-LABOR RELATIONS OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS AND CONCLUDES THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS AN INITIALLY SUCCESSFUL POLICY DESIGNED TO CURB THE POLITICAL RADICALISM OF THE KUWAIT WORKERS CONFEDERATION LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTE INSTEAD AN ORIENTATION TOWARD "BREAD AND BUTTER" ISSUES.

5. WE HAVE ALSO REPORTED THE REVIVAL OF PUBLIC POLITICAL MEETINGS IN KUWAIT (REF A) A TRADITION WHICH GOES BACK LONG BEFORE INDEPENDENCE AND ONE WHICH HAS SERVED BOTH AS A SAFETY VALVE AND A VALUABLE INDICATION OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT. WHILE THE MEETINGS HAVE SO FAR BEEN LIMITED ONLY TO UNIVERSITY-SPONSORED ACTIVITIES, IT SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL CLUBS MAY BE SPONSORING MEETINGS ONCE AGAIN. THE CLUBS ALSO APPEAR TO BE AGAIN IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, AND SOME MISSIONS ARE BEING PERMITTED TO USE CLUB FACILITIES FOR CULTURAL EVENTS. (WE WERE REFUSED SUCH COOPERATION BY THE GRADUATE SOCIETY AND THE ENGINEERS SOCIETY LAST FALL DUE TO THE PERCEIVED RISK OF GOVERNMENT DISAPPROVAL WHICH THESE CLUBS FELT THEY WOULD RUN.)

6. EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS ALSO WILL AFFECT THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CLIMATE. THE PROSPECT OF AN AREA SETTLEMENT (INCLUDING A LEBANESE SOLUTION) AND DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CONFIDENTIAL

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GULF SECURITY ARE CRITICAL TO KUWAITI PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUWAIT 2590

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

OWN INTERNAL SECURITY. THESE PERCEPTIONS WILL, IN TURN, STRONGLY
AFFECT GOVERNMENT TOLERANCE OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY AND INTERNAL
DISSENT. IN THE ABSENCE OF A NEW INTRA-ARAB OR GULF
CONTROVERSY WHICH PLACES KUWAIT ON A PUBLIC FENCE OR EXPOSES
IT TO PALESTINIAN CRITICISM, KUWAITI FOREIGN RELATIONS SHOULD NOT
IMPEDE POLITICAL RELAXATION AT HOME.
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